

Overseas Pakistanis may be allowed to bring two cell phones

After facing strong criticism on new mobile phone tax policy for foreign visitors as well as concerns shown by overseas Pakistanis on it, the government is considering revising the policy and may allow at least two duty free cell phones. The overseas Pakistanis, telecommunication operators and industry experts have expressed concern over the government's new policy to allow only one duty free mobile phone for the overseas travellers.

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has also reportedly taken up the issue of imposing duty on the imported mobile phones with the government but remains unsuccessful in convincing the government.

The overseas Pakistanis not only have to stand in one extra queue for the registration of their own phones but they also have to pay heavy duty on any gift phone they might have brought for their family member or friend. Under the new policy aimed at curbing phone smuggling and use of unregistered phones, the PTA has introduced Device Identification Registration and Blocking System (DIRBS).

The latest situation has also been confirmed by Special Assistant on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Syed Zulfikar Hussain Bukhari, alias Zulfikar Bukhari. Bukhari said, "Owing to huge amount of feedback received about regulation on phones, I have requested Minister of State for Revenue Hammad Azhar to lower tax on cell phones and at least allow two duty free phones. We are listening to overseas Pakistanis and will do our best to facilitate them around the world," he added.

A few days back Bukhari had stated that the mobile tax policy has no impact on visiting overseas Pakistanis who are allowed to carry one duty free phone. With devices worth Rs 110 billion being smuggled annually mainly through airports, this measure will help broaden tax net and encourage local manufacturers, he added.

The FBR's Customs authorities are registering mobile phones under the newly placed system at all the international airports. Each passenger is allowed to bring only one duty free phone from abroad while he/she will have to pay duty/taxes on any additional phone bought from abroad.

On December 11, Hammad Azhar unveiled the new policy saying that the people travelling to Pakistan would be allowed only one duty free mobile phone set under the new mobile tax policy and phones would not be detained during the process of registration or duty payments.

Azhar said for the benefit of people travelling into Pakistan from abroad, the mobile tax policy revealed that one phone is allowed to be registered as duty free. Secondly, no registration/duty is needed for any phone(s) using roaming. Thirdly, no registration/ duty is needed if phones are to be used in Pakistan for less than 30 days. Moreover, no registration/duty is required on any phone that was activated or ever used in Pakistan before 1st of December 2018. Azhar stated that the duties and registration can be done either at the airports or at any of the customs houses across Pakistan. markets.

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